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USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT TAKES LEAD IN LOCATING HOUSING FOR HURRICANE EVACUEES *Next Step – Rebuilding Communities*

ALEXANDRIA, October 11, 2005 – During the worst days following Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, when thousands of evacuees were trying to find places of safe refuge, USDA Rural Development was working aggressively to place families in housing.

“USDA Rural Development finances many of the apartment complexes in rural communities across the nation,” said Michael B. Taylor, State Director for USDA Rural Development in Louisiana. “These apartment complexes opened their doors to hundreds of families in Louisiana—and hundreds more in other states across the nation.”

In Louisiana alone, 702 families have found safe refuge in USDA Rural Development-financed apartment complexes. “If you were to average three to four people per family, at least 2,457 people are now out of shelters and in a home of their own thanks to USDA Rural Development,” said Taylor.

As a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, USDA Rural Development has waived many prerequisites for new renters—there is no income limitation and rental assistance may be available for those who have been displaced by a hurricane and have no source of income due to the hurricane.

Thousands of telephone calls have been received by USDA Rural Development staff regarding housing opportunities, and over 11,000 evacuees have been interviewed by USDA Rural Development in Disaster Recovery Centers established throughout Louisiana.

“Throughout this crisis, our agency has done everything possible to put the needs of the people first,” said Taylor. “The next step will be rebuilding the stricken communities.”

USDA Rural Development funded many of the water and waste systems in the rural communities impacted by the hurricanes, as well as essential community facilities such as fire stations, police stations, hospitals, and schools—and thousands of single family homes. Many of the homes, water and waste systems, and community facilities were heavily damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

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“We have implemented USDA Rural Development payment options for hurricane impacted water and waste systems—and suspended USDA Rural Development home loan payments in hurricane impacted areas,” said Taylor. “We are currently meeting with water and waste systems to determine immediate and long-term needs and working with state and local officials to begin putting our communities back together.”

USDA Rural Development has designated a toll-free number to assist homeowners, renters, and others in need of housing assistance. The toll-free number is 1-800-414-1226. Information is also available on the USDA web site at: <http://www.usda.gov/usdakatrina.xml>.

For more information on USDA Rural Development programs or specific information regarding special hurricane provisions, contact Louisiana’s USDA Rural Development State Office at (318) 473-7921. There are four area offices located throughout the state to serve Louisiana residents: Monroe Area Office: telephone (318) 343-4467, extension 4; Natchitoches Area Office: telephone (318) 352-7100, extension 4; Lafayette Area Office: telephone (337) 262-6601, extension 4; and Amite Area Office: telephone (985) 748-8751, extension 4. Further information on USDA Rural Development’s loan and grant programs can be obtained by visiting USDA Rural Development’s web site at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.

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